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### Deposited in DRO:

03 September 2010

### Version of attached file:

Published Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

James, S. J. (2008) 'Fin-de-cycle : romance and the real in 'The wheels of chance'.', in H. G. Wells : interdisciplinary essays. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 34-48.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.c-s-p.org/Flyers/H-G-Wells-Interdisciplinary-Essays1-84718-615-7.htm>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

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### Additional information:

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## FIN-DE-CYCLE: ROMANCE AND THE REAL IN *THE WHEELS OF CHANCE*

SIMON J. JAMES

Even given the bewildering generic variety of H. G. Wells's output, *The Wheels of Chance* (1896) seems a peculiarity. At first glance a work of picaresque lower middle-class *fin-de-siècle* comic writing like Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) or George and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892), this comedy of manners rests slightly uneasily among Wells's other works of the 1890s and 1900s. In his Preface to the 1925 Atlantic Edition, Wells describes the book as one of a 'series of close studies in personality', adding Lewisham, Kipps, Mr Polly and Ann Veronica as further examples of 'personalities thwarted by the defects of our contemporary civilisation. [...] It is a very "young" book; indeed, in some respects it is puerile, but the character of Hoopdriver saves it from being altogether insignificant'.<sup>1</sup>

Like many of Wells's earlier romances, even *The Wonderful Visit* (1895), *The Wheels of Chance* consciously participates in the aesthetic and political debates that would come to shape, then dominate, Wells's career. Even this relatively slight work prefigures Wells's assault upon the canons of Victorian culture that is characteristic to his later representations of the artistic and imaginative. Wells revolted, most conspicuously in his debate with Henry James, against the valuing of art for its autonomy from society, increasingly emphasising the necessity for art to engage directly in creating the utopia that he saw as the only alternative to mankind's self-destruction.<sup>2</sup>

Often in Wells's writing, this antagonism towards a notion of a disinterested high culture that he sees as backward-looking and harmful is expressed in a satire of the practice of reading, in particular the reading of fiction (1914's *Boon* is perhaps the most striking example). Both hero and heroine in *The Wheels of Chance* are afflicted by false expectations generated from reading stories, a fault from which Adeline Glendower in *The Sea Lady* (1902) and Muriel in *The Wealth of Mr. Waddy* (an early version of *Kipps*, first published 1969) will also suffer. Jessie Milton's

misguided plan for imaginative self-determination is inspired by a naïve reading of novels by George Egerton, Eliza Lynn Linton, Olive Schreiner and her own stepmother. Her 'motives are bookish, written by a haphazard syndicate of authors, novelists, biographers, on her white inexperience' (XVI); the narrator's ironic orthography mocks her desire 'to write Books and alter things [...] to lead a Free Life and Own myself' (XXVIII).<sup>3</sup> In the world of *The Wheels of Chance*, such fictions are not to be confused with 'real life'. Hoopdriver's rescue of her takes place in an imaginary pastiche of 'world of Romance and Knight-errantry' (XXII), derived from 'Doctor Conan Doyle, Victor Hugo, and Alexander Dumas' (XVII), Walter Besant, Mrs Braddon, Rider Haggard, Marie Corelli and Ouida. Even the rascally seducer Bechamel attempts, like Manning in *Ann Veronica* (1909), to seduce with talk of ' "art and literature" ' (XXIV).

Although even books by high-cultural authors such as Emerson and the historian Motley also provide too limited a means of making experience intelligible, Wells's main target is the stereotyping and cheap appeal of popular fiction, for which his work as a critic for the *Saturday Review* shows a consistent dislike.<sup>4</sup> His own scientific and early romances aside of course, romance is for Wells an innately conservative genre. Hall Caine had claimed in 1890 that romance is the true genre of idealism, that the literary artist should depict the world as it should be, rather than as he sees it: 'Not the bare actualities of life "as it is", but the glories of life as it might be; not the domination of fact, but of feeling'.<sup>5</sup> In an early article protesting against the unreality of Victorian heroines, Wells parodies Caine as claiming that, 'If life is ugly [...] it is our duty to make it pleasant in fiction'.<sup>6</sup> For Wells, the reader's imagination only turns to romance out of dissatisfaction with the real world; romance cheaply amuses, and saps the desire to make the real world better instead.<sup>7</sup>

The apprentice is nearer the long, long thoughts of boyhood, and his imagination rides *cap-à-pie* through the chambers of his brain, seeking some knightly quest in honour of that Fair Lady, the last but one of the girl apprentices to the dress-making upstairs. He inclines rather to street fighting against revolutionaries – because then she could see him from the window. (II)

Wells would later champion the kind of art that would fight alongside revolutionaries, by revealing possible alternatives to the existing order.

Wells's writing is very fond of the metaphor of knowledge as light: *The Time Machine*, for instance, regularly relies on this trope.<sup>8</sup> It is given literal substance in *The Wheels of Chance* in the opposition between deceptive, romantic moonlight and the revealing light of day.

There is a magic quality in moonshine; it touches all that is sweet and beautiful, and the rest of the night is hidden. [...] By the moonlight every man, dull clod though he be by day, tastes something of Endymion, takes something of the youth and strength of Endymion, and sees the dear white goddess shining at him from his Lady's eyes. The firm substantial daylight things become ghostly and elusive, the hills beyond are a sea of unsubstantial texture, the world a visible spirit, the spiritual within us rises out of its darkness, loses something of its weight and body, and swims up towards heaven. This road that was a mere rutted white dust, hot underfoot, blinding to the eye, is now a soft grey silence, with the glitter of a crystal grain set starlike in its silver here and there. Overhead, riding serenely through the spacious blue, is the mother of the silence, she who has spiritualised the world, alone save for two attendant steady shining stars. And in silence under her benign influence, under the benediction of her light, rode our two wanderers side by side through the transfigured and transfiguring night.

Nowhere was the moon shining quite so brightly as in Mr. Hoopdriver's skull. (XXIV)

In the light of subsequently more accurate self-knowledge, such pseudo-lyrical delusions are revealed for what they really are. 'Beastly cheap, after all, this suit does look, in the sunshine' (XXVII), muses Hoopdriver after the romantic fantasy of his new suit making him look like an aristocrat is eventually deflated.

Hoopdriver's guidebook informs him that Guildford is the setting for Martin Tupper's historical romance *Stephan Langton* (1858), in which the low-born hero saves a maiden from villainous noblemen. Tupper's narrator claims the authority of fact for showing even familiar and unexciting Surrey as home to stirring historical incidents, even 'romantic biography':

I will concentrate my pictured fancies in a framework of real scenery round characters of strict historic fame. [...] I will set before your patience rather reality than romance, drawing both landscapes and persons from the truth. [...] It may be possible [...] to make classic ground of certain sweet retired spots set among the fairest hill and vale county in South England [...] to invest familiar Surrey scenes [...] with their due historic interest; [...] to connect for your better entertainment our evident modern scenes (changed belike in such accidental features as culture brings about, yet substantially the same as to geography) with antique but actual incidents.<sup>9</sup>

In *The Wheels of Chance*, on the other hand, the mapping of romance onto the landscape, such as Hoopdriver's fantasy of 'pedalling Ezekiel's Wheels across the Weald of Surrey, jolting over the hills and smashing villages in his course' (XII) (prefiguring the destruction of Surrey in

Wells's later scientific romance *The War of the Worlds*) is made ironic by the humdrum nature of his environment in reality. In contrast to Tupper's assertion that romance might have occurred in the same place as contemporary real life, fantasy is undercut by present reality.

*The Wheels of Chance*'s generic dissonance is sustained throughout by the device of a archly self-conscious narrator who deflates the central characters' romantically phrased aspirations to be a chivalric hero and the independent heroine of a New Woman novel. The narrator is alternately outside and inside the action of the plot and is not omniscient; he appears to be occasionally present as a character, like a Thackeray narrator. He is overt that he is relating a story – 'these things take so long in the telling' (IV), he pleads at one point, and repeatedly calls attention to Hoopdriver's misreading of his own story.

You must not think that there was any telling of these stories of this life-long series by Mr. Hoopdriver. He never dreamt that they were known to a soul. If it were not for the trouble, I would, I think, go back and rewrite this section from the beginning, expunging the statements that Hoopdriver was a poet and a romancer, and saying instead that he was a playwright and acted his own plays. He was not only the sole performer, but the entire audience, and the entertainment kept him almost continuously happy. Yet even that playwright comparison scarcely expresses all the facts of the case. After all, very many of his dreams never got acted at all, possibly indeed, most of them, the dreams of a solitary walk for instance, or of a tramcar ride, the dreams dreamt behind the counter while trade was slack and mechanical foldings and rollings occupied his muscles. (X)

Like Mr Polly, Hoopdriver has juvenile taste in reading matter and fantasises about the 'gallant rescue of generalised beauty in distress from truculent insult or ravening dog' (X); as in the later novel, Wells's narrator mocks such conceit, but the fantasy is partly fulfilled, or rather temporarily indulged.

Romance traditionally privileges the singularity of its protagonist: this narrator repeatedly calls ironic attention both to the distinctiveness and ordinariness of his hero.

Mr. Hoopdriver was (in the days of this story) a poet, though he had never written a line of verse. Or perhaps romancer will describe him better. Like I know not how many of those who do the fetching and carrying of life, – a great number of them certainly, – his real life was absolutely uninteresting, and if he had faced it as realistically as such people do in Mr. Gissing's novels, he would probably have come by way of drink to suicide in the course of a year. But that was just what he had the natural wisdom not to do. On the contrary, he was always decorating his existence with

imaginative tags, hopes, and poses, deliberate and yet quite effectual self-deceptions; his experiences were mere material for a romantic superstructure. If some power had given Hoopdriver the 'giftie' Burns invoked, 'to see ourself as others see us,' he would probably have given it away to some one else at the very earliest opportunity. His entire life, you must understand, was not a continuous romance, but a series of short stories linked only by the general resemblance of their hero, a brown-haired young fellow commonly, with blue eyes and a fair moustache, graceful rather than strong, sharp and resolute rather than clever (Cp., as the scientific books say, p. 4). Invariably this person possessed an iron will. The stories fluctuated indefinitely. The smoking of a cigarette converted Hoopdriver's hero into something entirely worldly, subtly rakish, with a humorous twinkle in the eye and some gallant sinning in the background. [...] This day there had predominated a fine leisurely person immaculately clothed, and riding on an unexceptional machine, a mysterious person – quite unostentatious, but with accidental self-revelation of something over the common, even a 'bloomin' Dook,' it might be incognito, on the tour of the South Coast. (X)

If Hoopdriver were the hero of a naturalist novel (a school of which, rather unfairly, Gissing is the representative), determined entirely and predictably by his circumstances, he would be entirely predictable and thus fail to surprise the reader. Although Wells disapproves of late-Victorian romance in its most formulaic expressions, Hoopdriver's playful mental exploration of romance freedoms might allow the limitations of realism to be overcome. However his imaginative liberty may be curtailed in reality by economics and his poor education, the fact of Hoopdriver's possessing an imagination at all demonstrates his individuality.

The text's opening both employs and mocks the certainties of the late nineteenth-century literary naturalist, certainties that claim their epistemological certainty from the method of scientific enquiry.<sup>10</sup> The opening apes realism's presentation of outward surfaces ('nothing can be further from the author's ambition than a wanton realism,' the narrator later avers in Chapter VII) and the codes that may be read from them:

If you (presuming you are of the sex that does such things)--if you had gone into the Drapery Emporium — [...] you might have been served by the central figure of this story that is now beginning. [...] Under which happier circumstances you might – if of an observing turn of mind and not too much of a housewife to be inhuman – have given the central figure of this story less cursory attention.

Now if you had noticed anything about him, it would have been chiefly to notice how little he was noticeable. He wore the black morning coat, the black tie, and the speckled grey nether parts (descending into shadow and mystery below the counter) of his craft. He was of a pallid

complexion, hair of a kind of dirty fairness, greyish eyes, and a skimpy, immature moustache under his peaked indeterminate nose. His features were all small, but none ill-shaped. A rosette of pins decorated the lapel of his coat. His remarks, you would observe, were entirely what people used to call *cliché*, formulae not organic to the occasion, but stereotyped ages ago and learnt years since by heart. [...] Such were the simple counters of his intercourse. So, I say, he would have presented himself to your superficial observation. [...]

But real literature, as distinguished from anecdote, does not concern itself with superficial appearances alone. Literature is revelation. Modern literature is indecorous revelation. It is the duty of the earnest author to tell you what you would not have seen – even at the cost of some blushes. [...] Let us approach the business with dispassionate explicitness. Let us assume something of the scientific spirit, the hard, almost professorial tone of the conscientious realist. (I)

The opening pretends to dramatise a process of scientific induction: because Hoopdriver is perceived as a shop assistant, he is expected to behave in a certain way. Such inductive certainty relies on observation and experience, however, and Wells's implied reader, here assumed to be female and of the leisure and shopping class, has paid insufficient attention beyond the limits of the counter for any such inductive judgement to be reliable. Karl Popper demonstrated in 1934 the weakness of the inductive method: 'no matter how many instances of white swans we have observed, this does not justify the conclusion that *all* swans are white'.<sup>11</sup> While Hoopdriver may be perceived as unremarkable, this does not preclude him from doing, or at least dreaming of doing, remarkable things.

The opening chapter alludes to late-Victorian realism's outstanding exponent of this technique of inductive observation, Sherlock Holmes. Holmes's 'method' depends on all individual members of a certain category behaving in an identical way.<sup>12</sup> Recent critical tradition has tended to read Holmes as a force for social order and thus, like romance as Wells views it, ultimately a maintainer of the status quo.<sup>13</sup> Hoopdriver's presentation as an identifiable 'type' is thus ironic. In 'The Novel of Types' (1896), Wells argues that typology in fiction should still accommodate individuality:

The peculiar characteristic of Turgenev's genius is the extraordinary way in which he can make his characters typical, while at the same time retaining their individuality. [...] Turgenev people are not avatars of theories nor tendencies. They are living, breathing individuals living under the full stress of this social force or that.<sup>14</sup>

Mrs Milton's aestheticist suitors are mocked for their reversal of this dictum:

'A novel deals with typical cases'.  
'And life is not typical'. (XXI)

' "If I were a Sherlock Holmes," ' says Jessie later, ' "I suppose I could have told you were a Colonial from little things like that" ' (XXXIV): Hoopdriver, of course, is nothing of the kind. The rascally seducer Bechamel suggests to Jessie that 'men are really more alike than you think' (XXI), but the text encourages resistance to the notion that Hoopdriver's romantic aspirations are essentially the same as Bechamel's more 'Palaeolithic' ones. Wells's early journalism lays an obsessive emphasis on individuality, even down to, in the title of one essay, 'The Possible Individuality of Atoms'.<sup>15</sup> The status quo can be resisted by showing that the codes by which inductive judgements are made are arbitrary and unfair: indeed the plot depends on Jessie's misreading of Hoopdriver's clothing, language, culture and class:

His English was uncertain, but not such as books informed her distinguished the lower classes. His manners seemed to her good on the whole, but a trifle over-respectful and out of fashion. He called her 'Madam' once. He seemed a person of means and leisure, but he knew nothing of recent concerts, theatres, or books. How did he spend his time? (XXIX)

In order to generate the plot, Hoopdriver has to behave against the expectations of the opening. In order to do so, he must escape being moulded by his economic role, and go on holiday. Crucial to this liminal change of conditions that is his holiday is Hoopdriver's opportunity to change his appearance, particularly his clothes.<sup>16</sup> Wells himself had been apprenticed as a draper when a boy, and his narrative eye always carefully discriminates in matters of clothing and cloth, a capability shared by his draper-hero.<sup>17</sup>

Mr Hoopdriver, very uncomfortable, and studying an easy bearing, looked again at the breakfast things, and then idly lifted the corner of the tablecloth on the ends of his fingers, and regarded it. 'Fifteen three,' he thought privately. (XXXIV)

In his history of the late Victorian period, R. C. K. Ensor notes that, as mass-production made clothes cheaper, the working class began to abandon clothing distinctive to an individual and recognisable



occupation.<sup>18</sup> Codes for reading appearance thus started to become less reliable; the barmaid even prophesies that Rational Dress, the cycling outfit for women, will make it too difficult even to distinguish between the sexes (XVIII).<sup>19</sup> Hoopdriver's cycling fashion of a brown chequered suit allows confusion between his read identity and Bechamel's; Bechamel is angry at this bounder's imitation of bourgeois fashion:

'Greasy proletarian,' said the other man in brown, feeling a prophetic dislike. 'Got a suit of brown, the very picture of this. One would think his sole aim in life had been to caricature me'. (VII)

The plot thus depends on the democratising effects both of new styles of clothing alongside another class-levelling, cheaply mass-produced technological innovation, the safety bicycle.<sup>20</sup> 1896, the year of the text's publication, marked the height of the cycling craze.<sup>21</sup> The narrator initially plays on Hoopdriver being caught in a machine (as an economic metaphor, he is);<sup>22</sup> but the 'shocking' or at least surprising fact of Hoopdriver's appearance in the first chapter is his legs, for the 'machine' that he has been caught in is a bicycle. When his health permitted in the 1890s, Wells himself was a very enthusiastic cyclist: his *Autobiography* recounts a touching story about teaching George Gissing to ride.<sup>23</sup> The bicycle is democratic technology available to all classes; as well as granting additional freedom of movement and of dress to women such as Jessie, it blurs class divisions as well (unlike segregated rail travel).<sup>24</sup> The priggish central character of Wells's story 'A Perfect Gentleman on Wheels' is insulted to be spoken to as an equal by a capable cycling 'bounder'.<sup>25</sup> George's tricycling Uncle from *Select Conversations with an Uncle* (who makes a brief re-appearance in *The Wheels of Chance*, XIV) is insulted by working-class cyclists asking him the price of his machine.<sup>26</sup> (Hoopdriver correctly guesses the value of Jessie's). The cheapness of the bicycle did allow the more affluent of the working class greater freedom of movement; for Wells this translates into corresponding freedom of thought.

After your first day of cycling one dream is inevitable. [...] You ride through Dreamland on wonderful dream bicycles that change and grow; you ride down steeples and staircases and over precipices; you hover in horrible suspense over inhabited towns, vainly seeking for a brake your hand cannot find, to save you from a headlong fall; you plunge into weltering rivers, and rush helplessly at monstrous obstacles. (XII)

'The bicycle in its early phases has a peculiar influence upon the imagination,' Wells claims in 'A Perfect Gentleman On Wheels'.<sup>27</sup> The

nature of learning to ride requires the correct exercise of the imaginative and romantic as well as physical capacities: 'To ride a bicycle properly is very like a love affair; chiefly it is a matter of faith' (IV).

While the text's presentation of cycling repeatedly makes ironic use of romantic motifs, realism again periodically intrudes, especially in the undermining presence of the body: 'talk of your *joie de vivre*! Albeit with a certain cramping sensation about the knees and calves slowly forcing itself upon his attention' (IV). The deformation of the body by material, especially economic, circumstances is a recurrent trope in Wells.<sup>28</sup> Hoopdriver cannot masquerade as a gentleman indefinitely because of the deforming effect on his body of the economic machine in which the book's opening has seen him trapped. Meeting Jessie, Hoopdriver's 'business training made him prone to bow and step aside' (V); later he bows 'over his saddle as if it was a counter' (VIII). (George Bernard Shaw accused Wells of the same kind of revealing posture when speaking in public).<sup>29</sup> Jessie claims to be, 'blessed or afflicted with a trick of observation', and eventually notices the draper's habits of 'bowing as you do and rubbing your hands, and looking expectant' (XXXIV), and of keeping pins in his lapel, a habit earlier called to the reader's attention that Hoopdriver had hoped to escape on holiday. Even Hoopdriver's language is deformed, since the narrator chooses to render his speech as phonetic cockney rather than in correct orthography.<sup>30</sup> Eventually Hoopdriver confesses to Jessie, 'Ay'm a deraper' (XXXV – though also of course he is a de-raper in the sense that he saves Jessie from rape). The romantic imagination can take the man out of the draper's, it seems, but not the draper out of the man.

Reality also asserts itself in reminders of the presence of money: Hoopdriver's wobbling bicycle imaginatively leaves 'a track like one of Beardsley's feathers' (V), but the track of Jessie's is 'milled like a shilling' (XX). Monetary metaphors serve as a reminder that the hero and heroine's romantic holiday adventures are underwritten by money, and are thus finite. Jessie's chastity is assailed by Bechamel as ' "If saving it is – this parsimony" ' (XXI); when abandoned by Jessie, he feels 'sold' (XXIII). The escapade in the moonlight leaves Hoopdriver with 'profit and loss; profit, one sister with bicycle complete, wot offers? – cheap for tooth and 'air brush, vests, night-shirt, stockings, and sundries' (XXVII). Finally the exhaustion of Hoopdriver's five-pound note and Jessie's £2 7s. ends their picaresque. 'Hoopdriver, indeed, was quite spent, and only a feeling of shame prolonged the liquidation of his bankrupt physique' (XXXVII).

Without money, the carnivalesque holiday, and the narrative, must end. Hoopdriver returns to un-narratable work, and Jessie her domestic

imprisonment now at the hands of Widgery as well as Mrs Milton. For a comic romance, the conclusion is pessimistic. Jessie will lend Hoopdriver books, but the reader has already been told how little leisure for reading the life of a draper affords, and reminded of the gulf separating books from real life.

'Anyhow, if I'm not to see her - she's going to lend me books,' he thinks, and gets such comfort as he can. And then again: 'Books! What's books?' (XLI)<sup>31</sup>

That Wells thought the ending too pessimistic, for Jessie at least, is shown by his revisions of the ending for the 1901 fourth edition of *The Wheels of Chance* and the 1925 Atlantic Edition, volume seven of his collected *Works*. Wells could be an indifferent editor of his own work, but the *Wheels of Chance*'s prose style and a few typographical errors are revised. The Atlantic also acknowledges the inevitable lapse in time between the events narrated and their being read. The plot begins on the 14th August, 1895. The first edition has Sherlock Holmes 'now, after a glorious career, happily and decently dead,' 1925, 'now happily dead' (I).<sup>32</sup> In the first version, the ending appeals to the impossibility of a realist history of events that have not yet occurred: 'And of what came of it all, of the six years and afterwards, this is no place to tell. In truth, there is no telling it, for by a comparison of the dates you will readily perceive that the years have still to run' (XLI). The 1925 narrator claims ignorance instead, omitting 'by a comparison of the dates you will readily perceive that'.

Jessie's dream of succeeding as a New Woman shows more promise of being fulfilled in the Atlantic text, which rewrites the first half of chapter XXXIX. The clergyman whom Hoopdriver meets earlier proves to be connected to the pursuit.

[Miss Mergle] had picked up the clergyman in Ringwood, and had told him everything forthwith, having met him once at a British Association meeting. He had immediately constituted himself as administrator of the entire business. Widgery, having been foiled in an attempt to conduct the proceedings, stood with his legs wide apart in front of the fireplace ornament, and looked profound and sympathetic. (1925, XXXIX)

In 1896 and 1901, Jessie is interrogated in chapter thirty-nine only by her stepmother and her schoolmistress Miss Mergle; in 1925 they are joined by Widgery and the clergyman. In the original text she admits to running away with Mrs Milton's friend Bechamel, and Jessie is

interrupted too frequently to make any defence of her 'heroic mechanic' (1896, XXXIX). The latest text reads instead:

She surprised herself by skilfully omitting any allusion to the Bechamel episode. She completely exonerated Hoopdriver from the charge of being more than an accessory to her escapade. [...] Her narrative was inaccurate and sketchy, but happily the others were too anxious to press opinions to pin her down to particularities.

In all versions, Miss Mergle's interruptions are ill-judged and ignorant; in the earlier text, Mrs Milton is equally hostile towards Jessie's desire to escape.

'Women write in books about being free, and living our own life, and all that sort of thing. No one is free, free even from working for a living, unless at the expense of someone else. I did not think of that. I wanted to do something in the world, to be something in the world, something vaguely noble, self-sacrificing and dignified'.

'You enlarge in the most egotistical way,' began Miss Mergle, 'on your own sentiments'. (1896, XXXIX)

The addition of two further interlocutors, however, disrupts the force of Miss Mergle's condemnation.

'I cannot understand this spirit of unrest that has seized upon the more intelligent portion of the feminine community. You had a pleasant home, a most refined and intelligent lady in the position of your mother [...] to cherish, protect, and advise you. And you must needs go out of it all alone into a strange world of unknown dangers –'

'I wanted to learn,' said Jessie.

'You wanted to learn. May you never have anything to *unlearn*'.

'Ah!' from Mrs. Milton, very sadly.

'It isn't fair for all of you to argue at me at once,' submitted Jessie, irrelevantly.

'A world full of unknown dangers,' resumed the clergyman. 'Your proper place was surely the natural surroundings that are part of you. You have been unduly influenced, it is only too apparent, by a class of literature which, with all due respect to distinguished authoress that shall be nameless, I must call the New Woman Literature. In that deleterious ingredient of our book boxes –'

'I don't altogether agree with you there,' said Miss Mergle, throwing her head back and regarding him firmly through her spectacles, and Mr. Widgery coughed.

'What HAS all this to do with me?' asked Jessie, availing herself of the interruption. (1925, XXXIX)

None of the four can agree in their response; the articulation of society's conventional disapproval by the others allows Mrs Milton to be comparatively more sympathetic. The revised text also allows Jessie to insist on saying goodbye to Hoopdriver, a scene elided in the earlier version, and not only suggests the possibility of Jessie's rapprochement with her stepmother, but even a future Woolfian independence:

‘I want a room of my own, what books I need to read, to be free to go out by myself alone, Teaching –’  
‘Anything,’ said Mrs Milton. ‘Anything in reason’. (1925, XXXIX)<sup>33</sup>

In both versions, however, Hoopdriver is excluded from this final conference. The texts largely rejoin in the penultimate page of the chapter, with the paragraph beginning ‘Meanwhile Mr Hoopdriver made a sad figure in the sunlight outside’ (XXXIX). Later revisions serve to increase the distance between Jessie and Hoopdriver. The text of 1901 deletes Jessie's praise of Hoopdriver, ‘ “You have courage, you have chivalry – you have all the best” ’; and her question ‘ “Need you be always a shopman?” ’ (XL); ‘The value of a promise, a youthful promise’ (1896, XL) is reduced to ‘the value of a promise’ (1901, XL); the sentence ‘He recovered his balance and went on, not looking back’ from 1896 is omitted in 1901 (although restored in 1925). In the Atlantic edition Jessie even ‘looked at her watch ostentatiously’. The paragraph beginning ‘She stood on ground a little higher than he,’ in which Jessie is bathed in sunlight and looks down at him, is omitted entirely, as is the sentence about the value of a promise.<sup>34</sup> The adverb ‘softly’ is removed from Jessie's admonition for Hoopdriver to work; she also adds, ‘ “You are not a very strong man, you know, now – you will forgive me – nor do you know all you should” ’ (1925, XL). Hoopdriver's speculation ‘ “Suppose a chap *was* to dress himself jist as hard as he could – what then?” ’ and repainting of his machine are both removed.

The *Wheels of Chance*'s narrator does, as in many of Wells's early pieces, make a claim for the value of lowly types such as Hoopdriver:

But if you see how a mere counter-jumper, a cad on castors, and a fool to boot, may come to feel the little insufficiencies of life, and if he has to any extent won your sympathies, my end is attained. (XLI)

The author's choice of an unromantic, unhappy ending deprives his readers of the comfort of thinking that the underlings who serve them in shops all live contented lives. This form of ending forces the reader to confront the economic and class inequalities of such a relationship. As well as being a character, Hoopdriver himself is a reader, albeit one with

less time for reading than the text's own implied reader, and the narrator hopes that Hoopdriver's disillusionment over the course of the narrative might turn his desires away from romantic fantasy towards more concrete political goals:

To-morrow, the early rising, the dusting, and drudgery, begin again--but with a difference, with wonderful memories and still more wonderful desires and ambitions replacing those discrepant dreams. (XLI)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of H. G. Wells: Atlantic Edition*, 28 vols (London: Unwin, 1924-27), VII, *The Wheels of Chance*, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> See my own 'Pathological Consumption: Commodities and the End of Culture in H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay*' in *Consuming for Pleasure*, ed. by Nickianne Moody and Julia Hallam (Liverpool: Liverpool John Moores University Press, 2000), pp. 44-61 and *Henry James and H. G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship, their Debate on the Art of Fiction and their Quarrel*, ed. by Leon Edel and Gordon Ray (London: Hart-Davis, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Wheels of Chance* (London: Dent, 1896). Since I will be referring to more than one edition of this text, the numbers given are for chapters, rather than pages.

<sup>4</sup> H. G. Wells, 'Popular Writers and Press Critics', *Saturday Review*, 81 (1896), 145-6, collected in *H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism*, ed. by Patrick Parrinder and Robert M. Philmus (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), pp. 74-7.

<sup>5</sup> Hall Caine, 'The New Watchwords of Fiction', *Contemporary Review*, 57 (1890), 479-88 (p. 488).

<sup>6</sup> H. G. Wells, 'The Sawdust Doll', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 May 1895, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 44-7 (p. 44).

<sup>7</sup> For an influential case against popular culture along such lines, see Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 120-67.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Draper, *H. G. Wells* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Tupper, *Stephan Langton*, 2 vols (London: Hurst and Blacket, [1858]), I, pp. 2-6.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Emile Zola, 'The Experimental Novel' (1880), collected in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. by George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 162-96.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 27. On the decline of Baconian objectivity in nineteenth-century scientific thought, see Jonathan Smith, *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Jann, 'Sherlock Holmes Codes the Social Body', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 57 (1990), 685-708.

<sup>13</sup> See Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 109-117.

<sup>14</sup> H. G. Wells, 'The Novel of Types', *Saturday Review*, 81 (1896), 23-4, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 67-70 (pp. 67-68).

<sup>15</sup> See throughout H. G. Wells, *Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*, ed. by Robert M. Philmus and David Y. Hughes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), but especially 'The Rediscovery of the Unique' (1891), originally entitled 'The Fallacy of the Common Noun', pp. 22-31 and the 1894 letter advocating 'individualism in ethics, socialism in economy', p. 180n. Cf. also 'The So-Called Science of Sociology', *Independent Review*, 6 (1905), 21-37, collected in *An Englishman Looks at the World: Being a Series of Unrestrained Remarks upon Contemporary Matters* (London: Cassell, 1914), pp. 192-206 (pp. 195-96).

<sup>16</sup> I owe to the unpublished PhD. of Yoonjoung Choi, 'Real Romance Came Out of Dreamland into Life: H. G. Wells as a Romancer' (Durham University, 2007) the insight into the importance to Wells of the carnivalesque, an inverting of hierarchies that often involves the exchange of clothes between classes.

<sup>17</sup> For Wells's narrative persona pretending to deny this, see H. G. Wells, 'The Shopman', *Certain Personal Matters* (London: Unwin, 1901), pp. 80-4.

<sup>18</sup> R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 168.

<sup>19</sup> See James McGurn, *On Your Bicycle: An Illustrated History of Cycling* (London: John Murray, 1987), pp. 100-07 on cycling and women's fashions.

<sup>20</sup> The bicycle manufacturer Sid Pornick in *Kipps* advertises the 'Best machine at a democratic price'. H. G. Wells, *Works, Kipps*, VIII, p. 140. 'In 1890, twenty-seven factories produced about 40,000 bicycles. Six years later 250 factories were producing 1,200,000 machines'. McGurn, p. 98.

<sup>21</sup> McGurn, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 'Dimly he perceived [...] how the great machine of retail trade had caught its life into his wheels, a vast, irresistible force which he had neither strength of will nor knowledge to escape' (H. G. Wells, *Kipps*, p. 50).

<sup>23</sup> H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, 2 vols (London: Gollancz: 1934), II, p. 568.

<sup>24</sup> McGurn, pp. 90-93.

<sup>25</sup> H. G. Wells, 'A Perfect Gentleman on Wheels', *The Humours of Cycling: Stories and Pictures* by Jerome K Jerome, H. G. Wells, L. Raven-Hill, Barry Pain etc., (London: Bowden, 1897), pp. 5-14. See also Wells's 'Specimen Day [From a Holiday Itinerary]', *Science Schools Journal*, 33 (1891), 17-20.

<sup>26</sup> H. G. Wells, 'On a Tricycle', *Select Conversations with an Uncle with Two Hitherto Unreprinted Conversations*, ed. by David C. Smith and Patrick Parrinder (London: University of North London Press, 1992), pp. 54-57.

<sup>27</sup> H. G. Wells, 'Perfect Gentleman', p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, H. G. Wells, *This Misery of Boots: Reprinted with Alterations from The Independent Review, December 1905* (London: The Fabian Society, 1907), pp. 12-13, or the Selenites in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901).

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<sup>29</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells: Selected Correspondence of George Bernard Shaw*, ed. by J. Percy Smith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> See P. J. Keating, 'The Phonetic Representation of Cockney', in *The Representation of the Working Classes in English Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 246-68.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. ' "One book's very like another - after all, what is it?" ' wonder Kipps. ' "Something to read and done with [sic]. It's not a thing that matters like print dresses or serviettes." ' H. G. Wells, *Kipps*, p. 429.

<sup>32</sup> Conan Doyle killed Holmes off in 1893's 'The Final Problem', but bowed to public demand by resurrecting him in 1903's *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

<sup>33</sup> In Wells's unproduced dramatic version of the story, *Hoopdriver's Holiday*, ed. by Michael Timko (Lafayette: English Literature in Transition, 1964), the absence of the narrator reduces the farcical tone and emphasises political and sociological aspects. Jessie successfully escapes from her stepmother to a liberal-minded aunt, Mrs. Latham, and Hoopdriver is allowed a soliloquy to protest against social conditions.

<sup>34</sup> ' "Well?" she said, surprised and suddenly fearful. One thing he must say!' (1896)

' "Well?" she said, surprised'. (1901)

' "Well?" she said, surprised and abruptly forgetting the recent argument'. (1925)